



*The*  
STORY of  
VANILLA



# THE STORY *of* VANILLA



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*From a golden cup, Montezuma quaffed a mixture made from vanilla and cocoa beans*

## The Discovery of VANILLA



HIS is a story that begins among goblets of gold and pearl in ancient Mexico, and ends among the spotless dishes of an American kitchen. It is a story of how rare spices and flavors and delectable things to eat were once enjoyed only by kings and courtiers, but how they came to be the right of all people. It is a story of soldiers and peasants, and good cooks.

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Montezuma, proud ruler of the Aztecs, was eating, almost for the last time, in the splendor of his great banquet hall. Thirty years before, Columbus had claimed America for Spain. Now Cortez, the Conqueror, with his armored followers, thronged the palace of this Mexican king whose throne the white men, "children of the sun," were soon to seize.

Montezuma sat upon a low bench of stone, its back all set with jewels. Before him, instead of a table, was a huge cushion. A hundred courtiers came bare-foot to his presence, each bearing a different delicacy, served in a vessel made from a gorgeously painted gourd, from costly silver, gold, or pearl.

The Spanish men-at-arms watched in wonder. Was Montezuma to taste all these offerings? How would he



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choose the food he wished? Each courtier, in turn, knelt before His Highness, presenting some delicious dish, which the King accepted by pointing to it with his short sceptre, or refused by a turn of his head. From one golden cup Montezuma drank with very evident pleasure.

Bernal Diaz, a Spanish officer who noticed it, asked of a courtier, "What is that drink which your Ruler quaffs with so great delight?"

"It is *chocolatl*," replied the courtier, and told how the bean of the *thilxochitl* (vanilla) vine and the bean of the cocoa tree were compounded to make this wonderful drink.

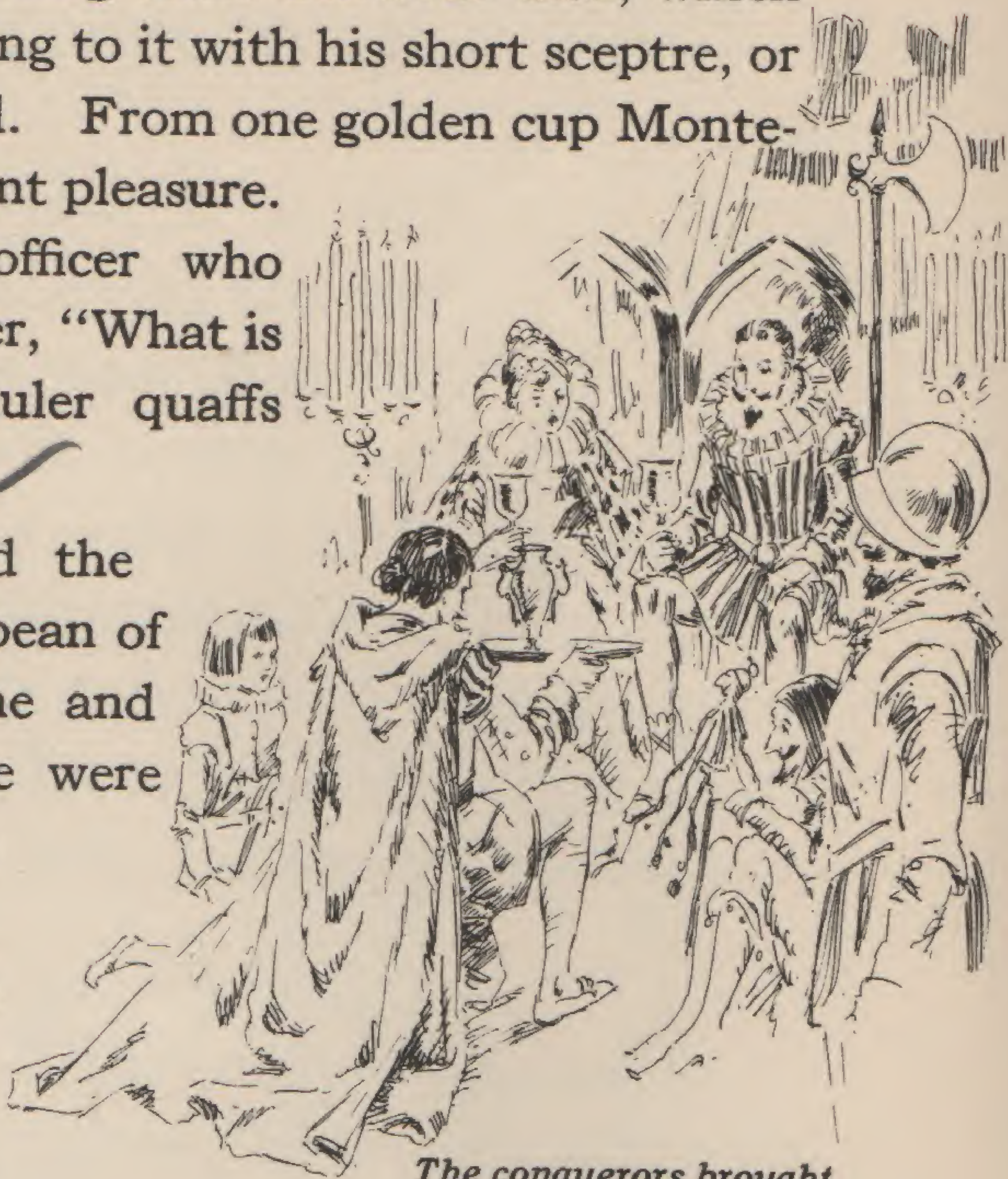
That is how vanilla was discovered.

The conquerors, of course, returned to Spain. One of the many wonderful things they brought back with them was the new drink, *chocolatl*, made from vanilla and cocoa beans.

At first vanilla *and* cocoa or chocolate were always used together to make the drink chocolate. Then people came to see that the flavor of vanilla was delicious by itself.

It was Hugh Morgan, of England, apothecary to Queen Elizabeth, who made the first mention of the flavoring, vanilla, which was then believed to have healing properties.

It was no wonder that the new flavor was well received, for the rich folk of Europe (in fact, people all over the world who could afford such luxuries) had always been looking for fine flavorings. Dangers — even to bloodshed — were daily



*The conquerors brought vanilla back to Spain*



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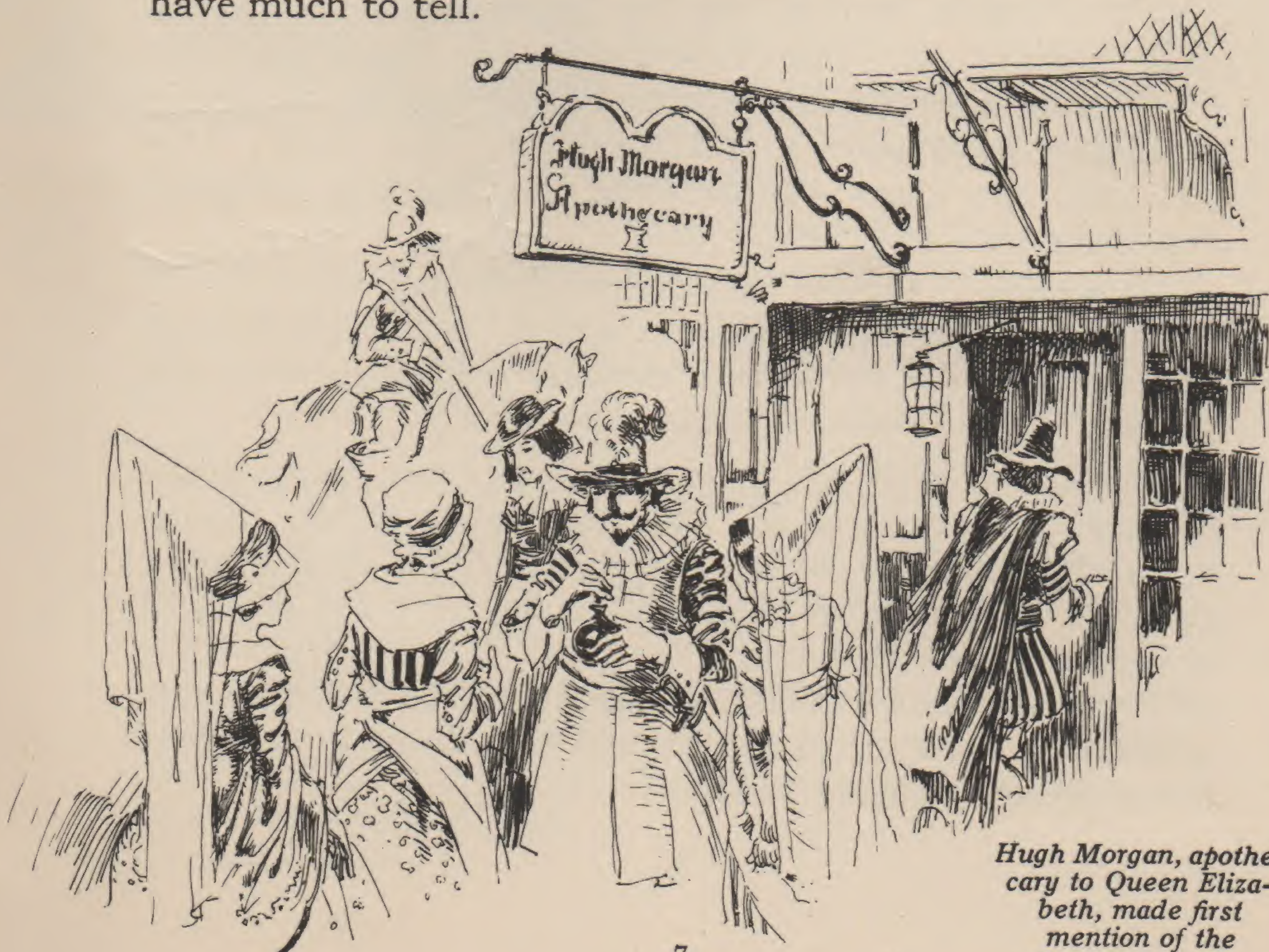
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being braved by voyagers who sailed to the Indies in search of spices to please these epicures of Europe.

The popularity of vanilla spread. Vanilla-growing in Mexico was begun on a larger scale. Instead of using ground or chopped vanilla beans for flavoring, people learned to use the *extract*. This gave them the finest flavor of the vanilla bean in a convenient form.

The price of vanilla became so low that not only kings and nobles but all people could afford it. The success of vanilla culture in Mexico led other countries to try its growth. It became our best-liked flavoring.

To-day, there are many manufacturers who make pure vanilla of delicious flavor, using the finest beans obtainable, blending them into extracts with the skill of master chefs. Of these, and of their standards and methods, our story will have much to tell.



*Hugh Morgan, apothecary to Queen Elizabeth, made first mention of the flavoring, vanilla*





Vanilla Vines

Brown Brothers, New York

## The Cultivation of VANILLA

AS a matter of fact, the vanilla "bean" is not a real bean at all. Out of the flower of a certain beautiful, fragrant, reddish brown and white orchid (*the vanilla planifolia*) there grows a pod, filled with tiny seeds. This pod gets the name vanilla from the Spanish, "vaina," meaning a pod, and "-illa," little. *two words*

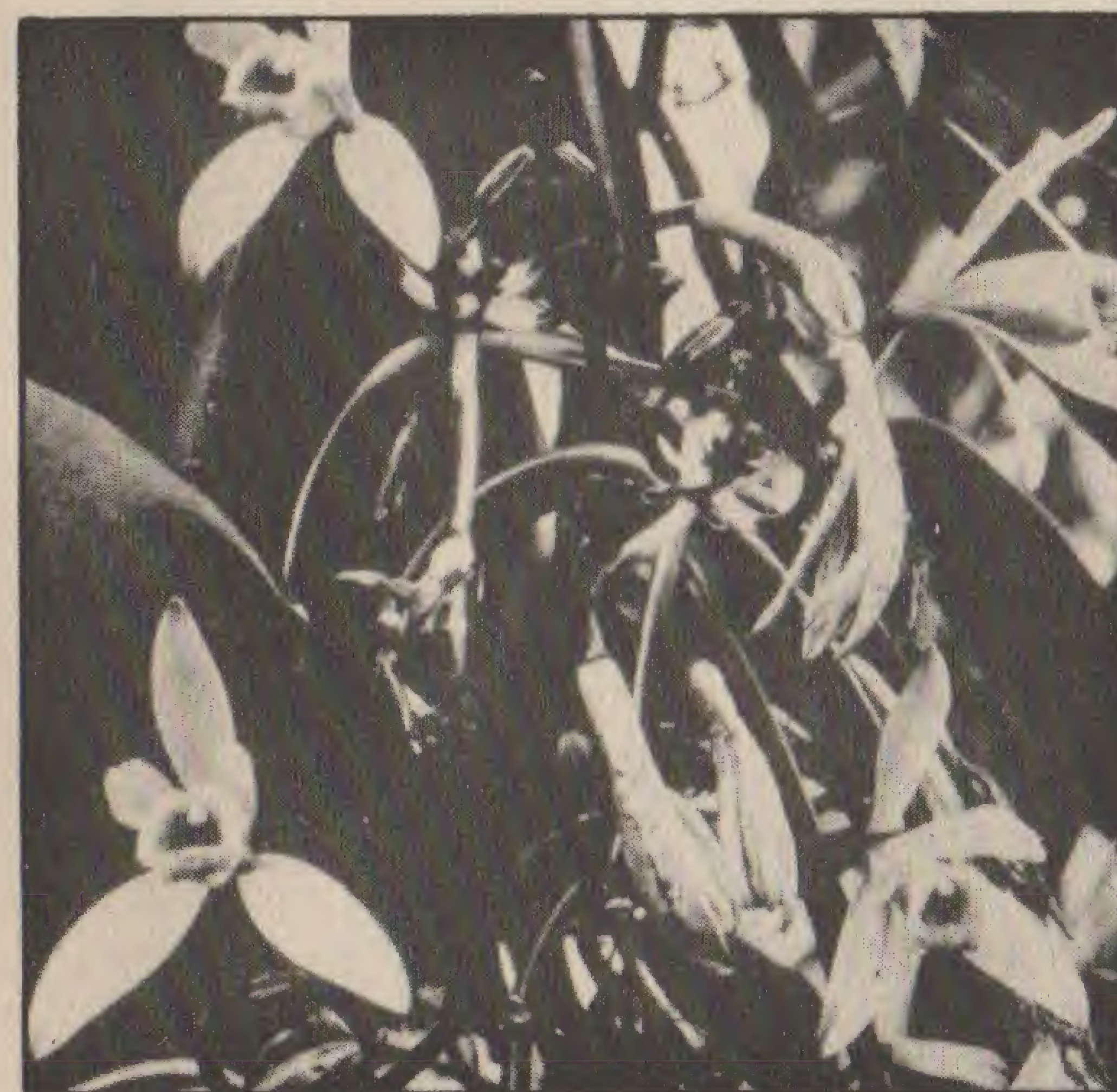
There are, in eastern Mexico, rich lowlands where the air is damp and hot, the soil is loose, and the sun filters through the trees to make patterns of sunshine and shadows on the ground. That is where vanilla grows best.

Vanilla is "planted" by setting slips from strong, fruitful vines into loose soil, and allowing them to climb. Sometimes the vanilla is set so that it will climb trees already growing. Again, poles or especially planted trees, arranged at regular intervals, support the vine. The undergrowth is cut back to about 8 inches, so that it will be heavy enough to keep the moisture in the ground, but not high enough to shade the low-hanging beans.

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The vanilla vine is of a zigzag shape, with joints six inches long and a long, dark, green leaf at each joint. When slips from vanilla vines are planted (a slip is usually five joints long) the two lower joints are stripped of their leaves, planted at the foot of the tree, and covered with dirt, rotted leaves and undergrowth.

These two joints form roots which crawl along the ground, beneath the decayed leaves and vegetation, for several hundred feet.



The vanilla flower is bell shaped, with single, separate petals

The three upper joints, which have been tied to the tree, zigzag their way up the trunk. At each joint they send out two velvet feelers which reach around the tree as you would do with your arms. Very little of the nourishment of the vine comes from the ground. Most of it is taken from the air or from the tree by these feelers or aerial roots.

When vanilla grows wild (and there are dozens of kinds of wild vanilla) it will climb as high as a two-story house. But the planter remembers that it is the hanging vines which produce the flowers, so he keeps the stems turned down, and does not let them get too far out of reach. Hanging vines, on the other hand, must not touch the ground. He pinches the ends of the stems to prevent this.

Careful pruning is necessary, too, or the strength of the plant will be wasted in growing rank wood and vine, instead of flowers and pods.

The vanilla flower is reddish brown and white, bell shaped, with single, separate petals. Before it will bear fruit, this blossom must be fertilized. Some pollen must be gotten on the stigma of the flower.



In Mexico there is a small insect which will pollinize the vanilla, carrying the pollen from one flower to the stigma of another. At the first attempt to grow vanilla outside of Mexico, it was found that no pods appeared. The choicest vines were taken to Madagascar, and Mexican soil was even sent there, but without success.

At last it was found that artificial pollination (which was, at that time, becoming more widely known and used) was the real solution of the problem. Planters in Reunion, an island near Madagascar, off the east coast of Africa, were first to employ artificial pollination in vanilla culture with success.

This artificial fertilization (bringing collected pollen in contact with the stigma) is easily accomplished by the aid of a slightly moistened forked stick. This work is done by the natives, who call the process the "mariage de vanille."

Artificial pollination was successful from the first. In fact, it proved even better than the natural method. A planter would fertilize only a moderate number of the most promising looking blossoms. These, and only these, would bear pods. So, instead of giving its vitality to produce a great many pods, none of them of high quality, the vine could be made to send all its strength into a moderate number of pods, producing fine long beans.



The black areas show where Vanilla is grown

Through this fertilization, it became possible to grow good vanilla in many other countries besides Mexico, although there, in the home of the plant, the choicest crop is still raised.



Courtesy of Dodge & Olcott

Artificial pollination of vanilla flowers

In the French East Indian Islands of Madagascar, Comores, and Reunion, and the nearby British Islands of Mauritius, and Seychelles, located off East Africa, are grown vanilla beans of excellent quality and aroma. These are called "Bourbons," from the fact that the Island of Reunion was once called the Island of Bourbon. The greater part of these beans, however, are grown in the northern part of Madagascar.

The French West Indies, too, especially Guadeloupe and Basse Terre, grow the fine "South American" beans. The "Java" beans of the Dutch West Indies are a similar product.

Next in the scale come the Tahiti beans, of good flavor. Least desirable are the vanillons or wild vanilla beans grown in South America.

Although these countries grow nearly all the vanilla beans produced at present, other countries are now trying their hand at vanilla culture. The United States Government has had considerable success in recent experiments with the growth of vanilla in Porto Rico, and beans of excellent quality are now produced there.

In each of the vanilla-growing countries, the vines are cared for in the following manner:

After the fertilization, in which men, women, and boys take part, the planter's hardest work is done. The pods begin to appear very rapidly. During this time the planter must watch the hanging beans, to make sure that they grow straight. If he neglects this (and many planters do) he will have deformed beans, which are of less value than straight, perfect ones. He must keep the stubble cut back, too, and the "machete," or long knife, must often be used to keep the trees trimmed, lest they give too much shade.

Shortly after the flowers have dropped, a number of pods also fall. Those left grow in bunches resembling thin bananas, six to ten beans to the bunch. The best beans are eight to ten inches long; the lower grades, only five inches or less. All are yellow green and banana shaped. Watery and tasteless, they lack the pleasant aroma of vanilla, which must be brought out by curing.

The vine is maturing, too. Its leaves begin to turn russet brown. The pods grow less and less green, more and more yellow. A hard black speck forms on the tip of the bean. The vanilla is ready to cut.



*Vanilla beans are like thin bananas*

Brown Brothers, New York



*The beans are exposed to sun and air*

Courtesy of Dodge & Olcott

## *Preparing VANILLA for Market*

**I**N the sunshine-quilted shade of tropical trees, swarthy men and women and boys, singing and shouting, gather the vanilla crop. They cut the clusters, stem and all, from the vine, and throw them into sacks.

A preparer cuts off the stems. The beans are taken to the place where the curing is to begin, usually in a nearby town. The method of curing varies a little in different countries, but the main idea is always the same. The beans are first heated in a large room, called an oven, then exposed to the sun and air, then put in a tightly closed place where they will "sweat." Then comes sunning again, then sweating again. The process is repeated many times until the delicate hidden flavor of the bean has been brought out, the yellow color changes to a rich brown, and the banana-like shape is dried out until it resembles a long, thin cigar.

Sometimes the beans are prepared for curing by plunging them into hot water. Sometimes they are scratched deeply enough to allow the escape of the moisture. Sometimes



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nature is given her own way and the curing process is begun by putting the beans immediately in the sun. The beans are sorted according to length, and imperfect beans or "splits," or "cuts" whose flavor is not so delicate, are kept in a class by themselves.

By day, when the weather is fine, the beans, on drying frames, are exposed to the sun. At night they are wrapped in blankets, or put in strong wooden sweating boxes which are covered with mats of straw so that the heat cannot escape. If the weather is wet the beans are moistened, blanketed, and heated in ovens. The heat is moderate and varied with the size of the beans. They are exposed to the air and heat, by turns, until they are cured. But sun drying is preferred, for beans cured in this way will usually keep better.

After all, however, sun and air and blankets, sweat boxes and ovens and all the rest are not the only important elements in the best curing of vanilla beans. A very vital part is the man who does the curing.

If Pedro is taking care of the curing of vanilla beans, you can be sure that Pedro's father and probably his grandfather before him were vanilla curers, and that he has learned the secrets of the art from them. You may be sure, too, that all his life he will want to have something to do with vanilla, for there seems to be a fascination about the fragrant, waxy beans, about vanilla



*"Sweating" vanilla beans by covering them with straw mats*

Courtesy of Dodge & Olcott



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itself, that no one can resist. No one, it seems, whether he be a picker or plantation manager, a curer, an importer, a salesman or a manufacturer, is willing to leave his work with vanilla once he has felt its spell.



Courtesy of Dodge & Olcott

*Packing bundles of beans in a tin container*

Pedro knows just how to treat each bean; how to expose it to the sun just long enough to bring out all its delicacy, yet not long enough to have it touched by sunburn; how to secure the rich, waxy, chocolate color, and the matchless aroma that goes with it; how to dry out the water in vanilla so as to make the beans fine and pliable without having them get mushy. All this is an art.

The beans, by this time, have lost a good deal of their weight.

Four to six pounds of uncured beans make only a pound of those ready to market. After being straightened, they are graded according to size, aroma, and soundness. Then they are ready to be bundled and shipped.

A bundle of vanilla is the shape of a very fat ear of corn, and, if it is made up of the best beans, is nearly ten inches long. In Mexico, forty of these bundles are packed in a tin container which, in turn, is shipped in a wooden case, usually of sweet-smelling cedar. "Cuts" made from imperfect beans and remnants are packed loose in great boxes. In Madagascar the beans are sometimes bundled, but frequently are packed loose in large cases.

About a million and a half pounds of vanilla beans are prepared, in all different parts of the world, in a year. Bour-



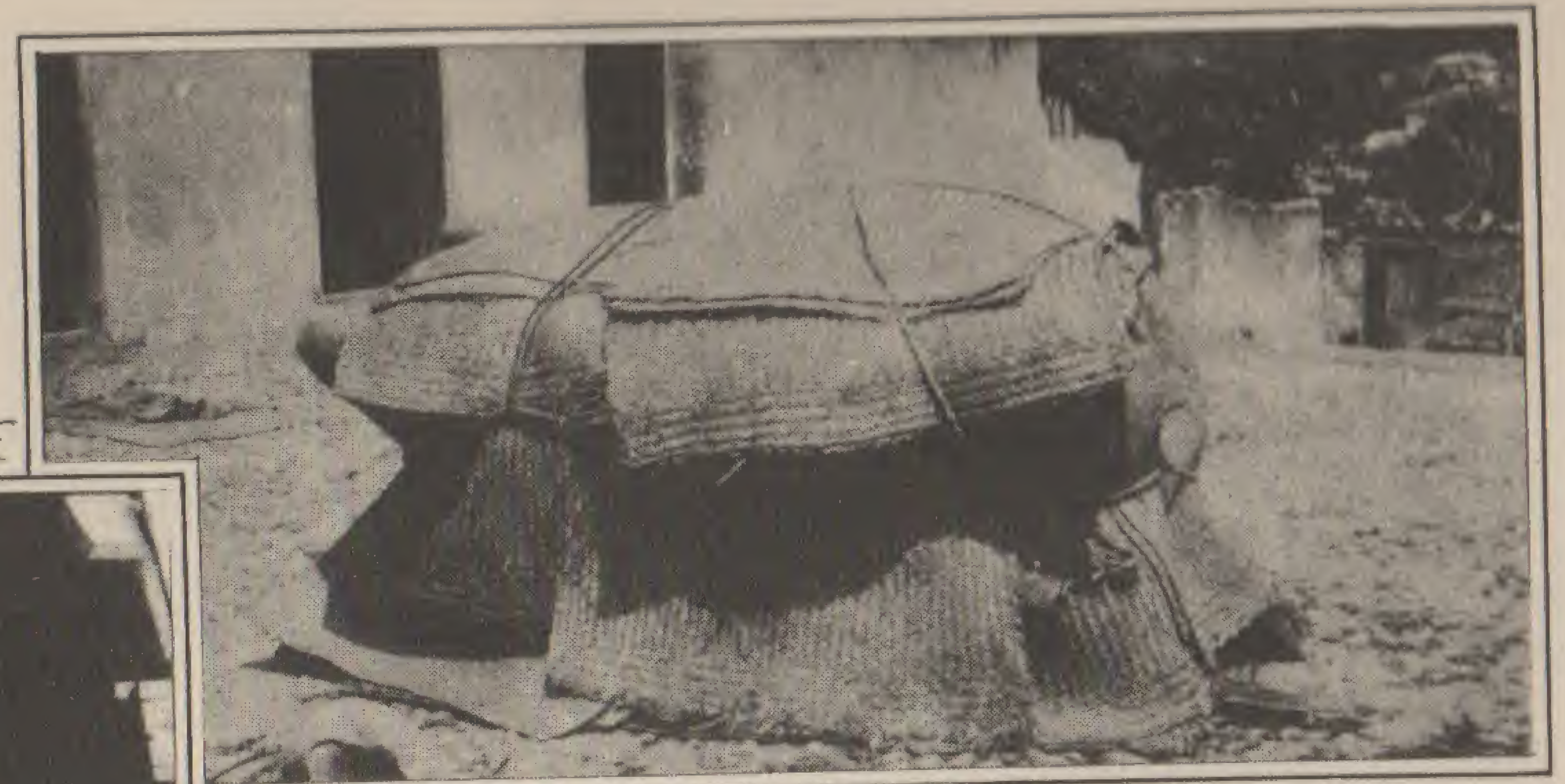


Pack mules carry supplies to vanilla plantations and bring vanilla back

## PREPARING VANILLA FOR MARKET

Photographs by courtesy of Dodge & Olcott and J. M. Limbert Co.

*A calorifico (vanilla oven) is often used in curing*



"Sweating" vanilla in a box tightly covered with straw mats



Vanilla is weighed before bundling



Gathering vanilla beans (left)



Tying vanilla beans into bundles



Measuring bundles for tins



Three tins of the finest vanilla



Shipping vanilla by boat



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bon beans, from Madagascar and the nearby islands, form over half this total; Tahiti beans a sixth; and Mexicans a sixth; the rest of the crop being South American beans, the Javas, and the wild vanillons.

By train (or by a caravan of pack mules in Mexico), the beans go to the coast. Then by ship they find their way to all parts of the world, most of them to the United States. Many will be used for flavoring chocolate, without being made into extract. Some will be used in scenting soaps or making perfumes. But by far the greater part of the crop will be used in making pure vanilla extract.



*The vanilla beans are sorted,  
according to length*

Courtesy of Dodge & Olcott



*Ingredients of pure vanilla*

## *Making the Extract*

**V**ANILLA beans, alcohol, clear pure water, and usually a little glycerine or sugar or both are the only ingredients used in making pure vanilla extract.

Chopping the beans, absorbing their flavor in an alcohol solution, and ageing, are the only steps in the manufacture.

It all sounds very simple. Yet selecting the choicest ingredients, treating the beans in such a way as to make them yield their finest flavor, ageing to bring out the extract's most mellow aroma — these are arts that extract manufacturers spend a lifetime in perfecting.

Buyers go to Vera Cruz, Marseilles and other leading markets of the world to secure the pick of the crop. When the beans have been received in this country, when they have aged, with the frosty vanillin crystals formed, the vanilla is ready to be made into extract. The beans are first chopped until they resemble ground coffee. The ex-



tract is then made by one of two processes — either by maceration and percolation or by percolation alone.

The maceration and percolation method is the older of the two. It consists merely in long, slow soaking. The chopped beans, put in vats, are covered with dilute alcohol, either warm or cold. Each day a small quantity of liquid is drawn from the bottom of the vat and poured in at the top until, after many days, the liquid has taken the finest flavor of the vanilla bean. The extract is then drawn off, sugar is usually added to it, and it is ready for ageing.

In the percolation process, the chopped beans are put in great baskets or frames, which are suspended inside huge vats. These vats are glass-lined for absolute cleanliness and are constructed like fireless cookers, with thick, heatproof walls to keep the temperature even.

An alcohol solution, lukewarm to hot, is pumped to the top of the vat and seeps slowly through the chopped beans. When it reaches the bottom, it is pumped to the top and the process repeated again and again, until the extract has absorbed the true, delicious vanilla flavor.

Whether made by percolation alone or by maceration and percolation, the extract is stored in great oaken vats to age and mellow. This process completed, samples are taken from both the top and bottom of the vat (if they are



*The percolation process takes place in glass-lined vats with thick, heatproof walls*

alike the middle will be the same too) to make sure of uniformity. After being subjected to the strictest tests for strength, purity, and aroma, the extract is ready to be bottled and shipped to market.

This process produces an extract which conforms in every way with the definition of the United States Department of Agriculture which says:

“A flavoring extract is a solution in ethyl alcohol, of proper strength, of the sapid and odorous principles derived from an aromatic plant or parts of the plant, with or without its coloring matter; the solution conforming in name to the plant used in its preparation.”

There are good reasons why the Government has ruled that a pure extract must be made with alcohol and must be made from the plant whose name it bears.

Pure flavoring extracts are made with alcohol because the esters of vanilla, lemon, almond, etc. (the real cause of flavor) do not impart their flavor satisfactorily to food unless they are *in solution*. By far the best way of keeping them in solution is by using alcohol.

When the extracts are added to food, the alcohol, which is very volatile, is driven off by heat and exposure. The flavor of the extract remains, but the alcohol has gone.

Imitation vanillas seldom use either alcohol or vanilla. Imitation vanilla has a taste and smell quite unlike the pure product. The imitation is made by combining synthetic coumarin, produced from coal tar, with vanillin. Vanillin is made either from eugenol or from guaiacol.

The Food and Drugs Act, however, for your protection, requires that all such products be labeled “imitation.”

Smelling a bottle of pure and a bottle of imitation vanilla will show you the difference. The pure vanilla has the more delicate aroma, while that of the imitation is ranker





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*Lemons grow on a bush-like tree  
with long, straggling branches*

## *The Story of other* PURE FLAVORING EXTRACTS

**H**UNDREDS of years before the Spaniards found vanilla, the Arabs brought a new fruit, the lemon, to Spain. The culture of this delicacy rapidly spread through Europe, and, later, to America.

To-day the finest of the fruit grows in sunny Sicily, though the other Mediterranean countries, together with Florida and California, produce large quantities of very excellent lemons.

The fruit grows on a bush-like tree, with long straggling branches; short, sharp thorns; and fragrant flowers and



ripening fruits present together at all seasons of the year. It grows about ten feet high in this country, and somewhat taller in India, Sicily, or Spain. These trees are very fruitful indeed, and a fine old tree in the Mediterranean lands will ripen as many as three thousand lemons in a favorable season. The lemon tree is very hard to cultivate.

Strange to say, the inside of lemon (the fruit itself) has no aroma, but only a sour taste, as you can see for yourself by eating a little of the fruit after paring off every bit of the skin. It is the rind which holds the lemon oils and the true lemon flavor.

The fruit is washed and pared so that the rind comes off in one piece. This is pressed against a clean sponge, which absorbs the oil. Another process is to roll the fruit over spikes, the oil running into a receptacle below. A third way consists of pressing the juice, oil and all, out of the fruit, and then distilling the oil out of the mixture.

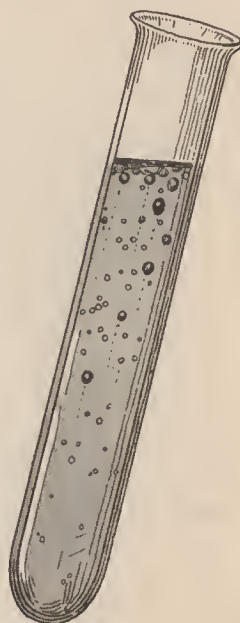
Lemon extract is made simply by dissolving lemon oil in alcohol. The Government requires that at least 5% of lemon oil be used in the mixture. Some manufacturers of pure extracts, however, not only meet this requirement, but use two and three times this amount to insure proper strength and aroma for their extracts.

By United States Government Standards, imitations of this extract must be so labeled.

You can tell good Lemon Extract, because, if you stir it in a glass or test tube half full of water, globules of lemon oil will appear at the

*Shake some good  
Lemon Extract in a test  
tube full of water.*

*The more globules of  
lemon oil which rise to  
the top, the finer the  
quality of the extract*



top, making a layer of the oil. The greater amount of this oil appearing, the finer the quality of the extract.

**O**RANGES have been grown since ancient times, in southern China and Burma. They were the favorite fruit of the Mohammedans, who used to transplant orange trees to each new land they conquered.

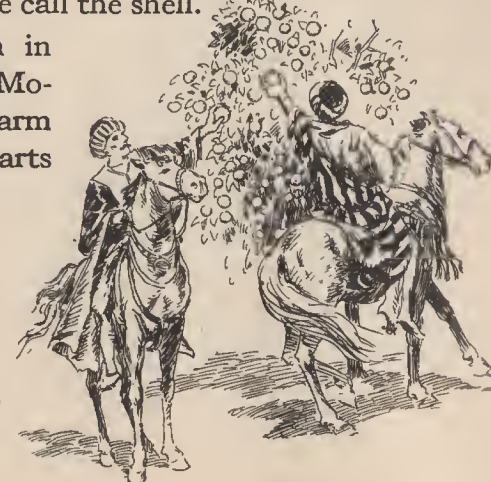
Oranges are much easier to grow than lemons. Italy, Spain, and Portugal grow the best of them, but those from California, Florida, and the West Indies are also of good quality. The tree is very beautiful, and in some countries is raised more for its fragrant flowers than for its fruit, for from the blossoms perfumers make a much prized oil called Neroli. The yellow, hard, close-grained wood is also highly valued.

Orange Extract is made in exactly the same way as lemon. In fact, when actually analyzed, orange oil differs very little from lemon, despite the great difference in flavor. The same government standards are observed by the makers of pure extracts.

**T**HE almond is a first cousin to the plum. The difference is that in the plum we eat the fruit and discard the seed, while in the almond we eat the seed, throwing away the leathery separate coat which we call the shell.

Almonds were first grown in western Asia, Barbary, and Morocco, but are now raised in warm temperate regions in many parts of the world.

*Oranges were greatly prized  
by the Mohammedans*





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and heavier, a grassy odor resembling new mown hay. You will notice the difference especially if the extracts are warm, for that is when they give off their fullest flavor.

There are many other ways to tell the difference. Hold a tablespoon of any vanilla extract you suspect over a flame until two-thirds of it has evaporated. If the liquid stays clear it is not vanilla, but an imitation product.

A simple test is this. On one lump of sugar pour a little pure vanilla, and imitation vanilla on the other. Suck one and then the other, and the difference is immediately apparent. Be sure, however, to sample the pure vanilla first, as the rank flavor of the imitation, if tasted first, makes it impossible to taste the pure extract at all.



*Pure vanilla is subjected to strict tests  
for strength, purity, and aroma*



The tree is of moderate size and would remind you of the other trees in the same family (cherry, plum, peach, etc.). The tree itself has been famous of old, the almond leaf appearing many times in the design of oriental rugs. It was well known to artists of antiquity. The Bible writers, too, often mention the almond tree.

Almond oil is made by pressing, powdering, and drying bitter almonds, allowing the mixture to ferment, and then distilling it by steam. The oil is then dissolved in alcohol, diluted with clear water, to make the extract.



*The almond is first cousin to the plum*

**T**HE basis of true Rose Extract is attar of roses, of exquisite fragrance. Oldest of all perfumes, this storied essence scented the luxurious Persian courts and wove its spell in Rome.

The attar is made by pouring water on rose petals and distilling them again and again, then skimming the oil from the surface of the liquid which has been distilled out. A ton and a half of rose petals will make only a pound of oil. Attar of roses costs about ten dollars an ounce.

**I**N making the extracts of raspberry, strawberry, blackberry, cherry, apple, pineapple, and other familiar fruit extracts, it was for some time thought that getting the true natural flavors from these fruits was an impossibility. In order to distill the flavoring oils out of the fruit, it was necessary to heat it to such an extent as to destroy the delicate esters, the cause of the flavor.

About fifteen years ago, however, the use of the vacuum still made it possible to take dilute alcohol which had absorbed the flavor of the fruit, distill it at a temperature low



*Cloves (top) are dried flower buds*

*Nutmeg (center) is a seed*

*Mace is the covering of a nutmeg*

enough so that the flavoring esters would not be broken up, and get the true flavor of the fruit. To-day all Pure Fruit Extracts are made in this way.

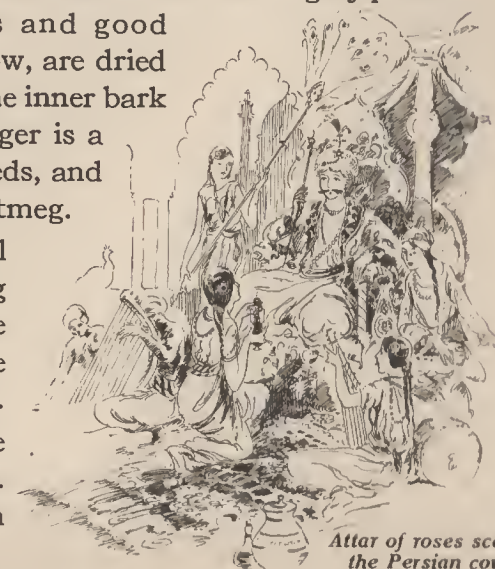
This process produces a far better flavor than that of the imitation extracts, chemically compounded from imitation ethers or esters, all of which are apt to taste alike, without tasting like fruit of any kind. These substitutes, however, must always be labeled "imitation."

**P**EPPERMINT, Spearmint, and Wintergreen oils are distilled from dried plants which bear their name. Celery Extract is made by grinding celery seed, and filtering it with alcohol.

Spices were, of course, our first flavorings, and since ancient times have been highly prized by epicures and good cooks. Cloves, as you know, are dried flower buds; cinnamon is the inner bark of a bush, as is cassia; ginger is a root stock; nutmegs are seeds, and mace, the covering of a nutmeg.

Spice Extracts are all made, either by dissolving the essential oil of the spice or by percolating the ground spice with alcohol.

Of all extracts, by far the most widely used is Vanilla. Lemon comes next, then Orange and Almond.



*Attar of roses scented the Persian courts*



tion especially welcome. Most people, however, like sugar, as well as vanilla-cream, on their morning cereals.

This combination is especially desirable to use on bran, for it makes this healthful breakfast dish very much more palatable.

A few drops of Vanilla in the cream which is to be put on berries or any sort of cut-up fruit, such as peaches, bananas or prunes, adds tremendously to the delicacy of the flavor. This is a French custom.

Whipped cream, too, becomes more delicious with the addition of a few drops of Vanilla.

A few drops of Vanilla or Cinnamon Extract put new zest into cocoa or chocolate.

Apricot pie is greatly improved by a few drops of Vanilla.

In home-made ice cream of any kind whatsoever, a few drops of Vanilla bring out the flavor and make this dessert more delicious. Any fruit flavor seems to be made better by the addition of Vanilla.

To apple sauce, or to any insipid fruit, any of the Spice Extracts add a welcome tang.

In cocoanut fudge or frostings, or in any dish containing cocoanut, a few drops of Orange or Vanilla Extract are particularly delicious.

There are some boys and girls to whom drinking milk falls in the class of an irksome duty. For them, a few drops of Vanilla, Cinnamon, Lemon, or Almond Extract, make milk more palatable.

At table, a very little Lemon or Rose Extract in the finger bowls gives a delightful aroma.

For spiced fruits or pickles, Clove, Cinnamon, and Nutmeg Extracts are convenient and delicious.

Spearmint Extract makes excellent mint jelly.





*A wise cook knows that flavoring is an art*

## *A Wise Cook Knows . . .*

**A**ND now the story of vanilla, which began in the gorgeous court of Montezuma, ends in a place that is no less romantic — the modern kitchen. Every day in this kitchen are made discoveries as fascinating as those which brought vanilla back to Spain, discoveries of new blends of foods and flavors, of more delicious dishes to tempt appetites, and, by tempting them, bringing happiness and health.

There are many kinds of extracts on the wise cook's pantry shelf, and she knows not only their ordinary uses, but the many unusual ways in which she can employ them. Below are some suggestions of new uses for flavoring extracts.

To make dry breakfast cereals more delicious, put a few drops of vanilla in the cream which is to be poured on them. The cereal itself should be hot and crisp, the cream cold.

Even without sugar, vanilla-cream adds tremendously to the delicacy of a cereal, and diabetics and others who must take their breakfast food without sugar, find this addi-